



Media Release

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Black Jack Soldiers Rewarded for Humanitarian Efforts in New Orleans

By Spc. Robert Yde
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FORT HOOD, Texas – “In 22 years, I have not done anything more fulfilling than going to New Orleans and helping fellow citizens,” said Col. Bryan Roberts, commander of the 2nd “Black Jack” Brigade Combat Team, while addressing a small crowd gathered in front of his brigade headquarters Feb. 10.

On this rainy afternoon, representatives from five of the brigade’s six battalions received the Humanitarian Service Medal, for the assistance the Black Jack brigade provided to the city of New Orleans as part of Joint Task Force Katrina.

The distinctively colored ribbon was established Jan. 19, 1977, and is awarded for meritorious, direct, non-routine participation in specified military acts or operations of a humanitarian nature.

Having returned from Iraq just months before, the Black Jack brigade, both undermanned and under-equipped, rose to the occasion, deploying more than 1,800 Soldiers to the hurricane ravaged city of New Orleans.

Black Jack operated out of Algiers Parish, a neighborhood located along the west bank of the Mississippi River.

While this neighborhood did not flood, high winds destroyed numerous homes and businesses and knocked out nearly every utility service.

Upon arriving to the city, Black Jack Soldiers found it in ruins.

“The debris, the smell, the trash, it all really stood out,” said Spc. Matthew Robel, who accepted the HSM on behalf of 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion.

The brigade assisted in the coordination of a plan for the restoration of sewer, water, electric services. Distribution points, offering food, water, ice and other essential goods were also established throughout the neighborhood. Just the presence of the Black Jack Soldiers helped provide security to the city, which faced widespread looting immediately following the hurricane.

“When you see a battalion in your community you’re going to behave,” said Sgt. James Simpson, the representative for 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment.

Roberts said that most importantly, however, JTF Katrina provided the Black

Jack Soldiers a chance to give something back to the nation.

“To be able to provide assistance to the American citizens who support Soldiers everyday was extremely gratifying,” he said. Roberts added that he is very proud of every Soldier who deployed to New Orleans, and that the HSM will serve as a reminder of all that they accomplished.

“It’s an honor to be awarded the Humanitarian Service Medal,” Roberts said. “We’ll wear it proudly.”



Col. Bryan Roberts , commander of the 2nd “Black Jack” Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, pins the Humanitarian Service Medal onto the uniform of Spc. Matthew Robel, a Soldier with 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion. Black Jack troops received the HSM for their role in Joint Task Force Katrina during a small ceremony Feb. 10. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kap Kim, 2nd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs)